
*Living Tomorrow in Human-Divine
Compassion: A Note on Celebrating the
1700th Anniversary of the Council of
Nicaea*

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Jesus: so human and therefore so divine...

How did Jesus of Nazareth become God?

Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff once noted that Jesus was so human that he could not but be also divine. Behind what may look like a theological speech-game, lie in fact several serious ancient questions whose discussion led the followers of Jesus in the early centuries to understand themselves as “Christians” and clearly identify themselves as such.

Ancient questions “for us and our salvation”

I bet those ancient questions sound weird to many people who still go to church today.

Have a look: was the divine Jesus truly a human being or just an appearance of human being? Was he adopted and made divine by God the Father when he was baptised... or when he was conceived... or even before his conception? Or how can one say that Jesus the Son was as divine as the Father, when this seems to be against the Ancient Testament teaching that God alone was truly God? Had not the Son been created divine by the Father

on the eve of the big bang, sorry, before the creation of the world?

Yes, those questions sound strange today, don't they?

But for our Greek speaking Christian ancestors, they were not. I just wrote that those questions were "serious". For them, they were far more than that. They were questions of "life and death". Why? Because for them, what was at stake in those questions was not only "who we are" but also our fundamental destiny as human beings. What was at stake in those questions was that they were questions "for us and for our salvation".

Global Christianity is pushing us
to a new encounter with our Christian ancestors

I believe that the present situation of global Christianity is pushing us to a fresh, new encounter with our Christian ancestors who answered to those weird but vital questions which remain inseparable from our salvation.

Some ancient Christian lands go today through a remarkable process of dechristianisation. In lands where Christianity is seen by Europeans as "exuberant", new ways of being Christian and living in Christian community show a significant departure from the way of believing and living of the past generations who transmitted to us the Tradition of the proclamation, the ancient *paradosis* of the *kerygma*.

Megatrends shaping tomorrow's world
are pushing us to a new encounter with
our Christian ancestors

I also believe that the need for a new encounter with our ancestors of the early centuries is reinforced by the missionary and ecumenical challenges raised by the megatrends that are shaping tomorrow's world: economic neoliberalism and the systemic inequalities it engenders; the climate emergency that leads to eco-anxiety and survivalism; the digital civilisation and the ethical and anthropological uncertainties created by generative artificial intelligence; the crazy remilitarisation of Europe that weakens the responses to the climate emergency; authoritarian national populisms and white supremacist Christian nationalisms that nurture themselves with the blood of human uncertainty and fear of the future.

Nicaea³²⁵: Who Jesus of Nazareth was
for our salvation

1700 years ago, a theological conference held on the shores of the lake of Iznik, Turkey, dealt with what was then perhaps the most crucial question about who Jesus of Nazareth was in relation to human salvation. For the participants in that conference, Jesus of Nazareth - who had compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, and promoted the imminent arrival of an age of human flourishing - was as divine as God the Father, of the same substance of the Father, or "God and Saviour" as we like to say in the ecumenical movement in reference to the theological basis of the World Council of Churches.

Human-divine compassion
for those on the margins

I believe that the present developments in global Christianity and the missionary challenges raised by global trends are calling local congregations, churches, and Christian world communions to a missionary return - through spirituality, new life styles, preaching and teaching - to a fresh, contemporary rediscovery of the ancient, foundational symbols of our faith which are inseparable from Jesus' compassion for those on the margins.

A non-conformist hermeneutics
of ancient symbols
for a counter-cultural ecumenism

Despite old and new divisions among us, a non-conformist hermeneutics of ancient symbols may lead us to a counter-cultural ecumenism nurtured by divine compassion, and to grow together in our common obedience to the apostolic faith.

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